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ABSTRACT

The study measured Mexican American secondary students' perceptions of racial/ethnic isolation in their educational environment. Utilizing the input from a committee of five adult Mexican Americans and five adult Anglo Americans, a 25-item questionnaire was constructed. Each item consisted of a statement describing a condition that may or may not exist in the students' perceived educational environment. For each statement, students were to respond to two questions: "To what degree does this condition NOW exist in your school?" and "To what extent SHOULD this condition occur in your school?" Items measured three areas of alienation--social, academic, and extracurricular. Ninety-nine questionnaires were completed by Chicano and Anglo students in secondary schools in Houston, Lockhart, McAllen, San Antonio, and Waxahachie (Texas). Analyses included a ranking of items by computing the discrepancy between the SHOULD and NOW responses. Among the findings were: of the ten top-ranking items, all but one were social or academic in nature; items dealing with positive social interactions between Mexican American, Anglo, and Black students and teachers were top ranked; verbal harassment between Mexican Americans and Anglos was identified as the number one area of isolation; and the need for schools to offer formal courses in human relations skills was identified. (NQ)

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MEXICAN AMERICAN PERCEPTIONS OF ISOLATION IN DESEGREGATED SCHOOL SETTINGS¹

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Objectives

The objectives of this study were to (1) review the literature for research on student perceptions of ethnic isolation in desegregated school settings and (2) to measure Mexican American secondary students' perceptions of racial/ethnic isolation in their educational environment.

Perspectives

The educational setting in the Southwest is one in which substantial desegregation efforts are taking place in schools with significant Mexican American student populations. An increasingly important variable in research is the perception of isolation by students in desegregated settings and particularly by the Mexican American student. The present study therefore reviewed the literature for research on the effects of school desegregation in terms of the perceptions of isolation/alienation by secondary-level Mexican American students.

The literature is limited and does not directly treat perceptions of isolation, but rather reports obliquely through studies of self-concept, alienation, and similar variables. The extensive U.S. Civil Rights Commission Study (Mexican American Education Study, Volumes I-VI) reported on several relevant variables such as self-concept in both segregated and desegregated

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schools with Mexican American populations. Felicé (1973) studied students in desegregated high schools and reported on the effects of these settings on Mexican American achievement. Newton (1969) found that Mexican American student contact with Anglo students was a significant factor in school adjustment; Donnelly (1970) attempted to define alienation by Mexican American students in terms of the degree of powerlessness, normlessness, self-estrangement, and expressed or implied isolation. Hathaway (1972) studied the differences in teacher-student relationships in Anglo, Black, and Mexican American students. Pruneda (1973) reports on self-concept in Mexican American students with high and low Anglo acculturation.

The literature review revealed little upon which to base or adapt a prototype instrument to measure student perceptions of racial or ethnic isolation in their educational environment, although general areas of investigation were identified.

Method and Source of Data

Utilizing the input from a committee of five adult Mexican Americans and five adult Anglo Americans, a 25-item instrument was constructed. Each item on the questionnaire consisted of a statement describing a condition that may or may not exist in the students' perceived educational environment. For each statement, students were asked to respond to two questions: (1) to what degree does this condition NOW exist in your school, and (2) to what extent SHOULD this condition occur in your school. A discrepancy between what SHOULD occur and what is occurring NOW identified an area of perceived isolation.

The instrument was designed to cover three areas: social, academic, and extracurricular. Items were included to measure all three areas of alienation. The instruments were administered to Anglo and Chicano students in

secondary schools in Houston, Lockhart, McAllen, San Antonio, and Waxahachie, Texas. Ninety-nine completed instruments were returned in time for processing. Analyses of the results included a ranking of the items by computing the discrepancy between the SHOULD and NOW responses for each student. A factor analysis was conducted on the discrepancy scores to investigate clustering of areas of isolation and to verify the construction of the instrument into social, academic, and extracurricular areas.

Results and Conclusions

Of the ten top-ranking items, all but one were social or academic in nature. Items dealing with positive social interactions between Mexican American students and Anglo students, Black students, and teachers, were top ranked, with verbal harassment between Mexican Americans and Anglos being identified as the number one area of isolation. One interesting social-area item indicated the need for schools to offer formal courses in human relations skills. Highly ranked unmet academic areas were the inclusions of the desires of Mexican American students in planning course schedules and the importance of Mexican American students' wanting to perform in the classroom, make good grades, and "get a good education".

The factor analysis generally confirmed the three-area structure of the instrument, and broke some of the areas into sub-areas. An eigenvalue cutoff of 1.0 was used, which yielded seven factors; 64.9 percent of the variance was extracted. The factors were interpreted as follows:

1. Social relationships among students.
2. Harassment among students.
3. Extracurricular activities--popularity-related.
4. Extracurricular activities--leadership-related.
5. Isolation due to poor academic performance.
6. School and authority.
7. Relationships with teachers.

Educational Importance of the Study

Educators are becoming increasingly concerned with the problems created by desegregation. This study reports the results of a statewide survey of minority student perceptions of isolation extant in desegregated school settings. The results of the survey can provide guidance to administrators attempting to solve such problems, and the instrument used in the survey can act as a prototype for future data collection.

Update of the Study

This paper was prepared in September and October, 1975. Since that time, however, several relevant studies have emerged and this study has been replicated on a sample in three Southwestern states. The authors, therefore, are presently enlarging this study; copies will be available through the authors or the ERIC system after June, 1976.

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